Hypnosis, Meditation and Your Mind

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A Brief Introduction to Hypnosis

When was the last time you experienced hypnosis? Many people are surprised to learn that they have frequently encountered hypnotic trance states throughout their lives.

A popular conception of hypnosis isolates it in the psychotherapist's office, in some kind of occult setting, or in the performance of a stage hypnotist. While early theories of hypnosis were based on mystical "mesmeric fluid" or "animal magnetism," a modern understanding of the field treats hypnotic phenomena as a process that utilizes natural shifts in our language and perception.

There is no hard and fast definition for a hypnotic experience or "trance." The best that we can do is to say that a trance state is an altered state of consciousness, one that represents a shift from "ordinary" waking consciousness. Some emphasis has been given to the ideas that a trance state represents a more internalized experience, a narrowing of focus, "dissociation," increased suggestibility, or automatism. While any of these can come into play in a hypnotic experience,

none of them are either necessary or universal. Perhaps one of the most useful definitions of hypnosis is "**a goal-directed striving which takes place in an altered psychological state**." (Ronald E. Shor, *Amer. J. Psychology*, Vol. 13, 1959, pp. 582-602). Speaking of hypnosis in the context of a therapeutic setting, another writer said, "**Trance permits the operator to evoke in a controlled manner the same mental mechanisms that are operative spontaneously in everyday life**." (Milton Erickson)

With this in mind, it may be easier to understand that our minds have the ability to shift from one state of consciousness to another very easily. We have all experienced trance-like states while daydreaming, while bored in a lecture or class, while driving along a long highway, getting a massage, sitting in a hot tub, when we shift our attention in order to read an article or book, to watch television, or to go inside our own minds to think about something. You may even be in a kind of trance state right now!

Taking this approach, some writers on the subject debate whether "all communication is hypnosis," or "nothing is hypnosis" (John Grinder and Richard Bandler, *TRANCE-formations*, Real People Press, 1981). Both points of view have their merits since, if hypnosis is simply altering consciousness, then any effective communication will do that to some degree. Simply describing

something that changed your own experience can have the effect of enabling you to re- enter the experience.

For instance, if you once went on vacation to a place that was enjoyable and relaxing, you could describe the experience of being in that place, using a few key hypnotic techniques, and re- experience the relaxation. Likewise, by making a few well-targeted suggestions about such an experience, you can help a patient or friend to relax. In such an exercise, a few important things to remember are: 1) Use all of the senses: sight, sound, feeling, taste and smell -- some people will tend to remember one sense more than another; by eliciting all of them, the experience becomes dramatically stronger, and may contain some otherwise unconscious elements. 2) Be "artfully vague" -- if you are directing someone else into a hypnotic memory, you can only ask about or suggest what you are sure of. For instance, you can suggest, "You can feel the temperature of the air," but you cannot necessarily suggest, "You can feel the warmth of the air," since, in another person's experience the air might not be warm. 3) Match your voice (or internal voice) to the experience -- if the experience is relaxing, use a relaxing tone of voice and rhythm, if it is exciting, let your voice reflect that. The process is outlined below:

Hypnotic Memories:

1) Identify a particularly relaxing or enjoyable experience.

2) Recall what you saw there, what colors were present, whether it was bright or dark, what objects were in your field of vision, whether there was motion or stillness in what you saw.

3) Recall what you heard there, what kind of tone the sounds had, whether it was loud or quiet, rhythmic or not.

4) Recall what you felt at the time, the temperature of the air, what position your body was in, what your skin felt like, what kind of emotional or internal feelings you may have had.

5) Recall what you tasted or smelled at the time, whether it was sweet or sour or bitter, strong or mild.

6) Run through each sense and increase the intensity in your mind -- make the colors brighter, the sounds clearer or louder, the feelings stronger.

7) Enjoy your experience and explore it in whatever way is comfortable.

This kind of suggestion can be used in a therapeutic or medical context to help a patient relax in the face of what might otherwise be an anxiety-producing situation. By accessing a past state when the patient was more relaxed, or had a reduced heart rate or lower blood pressure, it may also be possible to help the patient re-experience the physical parameters of that memory, as well as the mental. The suggestions can be incorporated into a conversational context, or can be marked out to isolate a "relaxation experience." As with anything else, practice

is required, though these techniques are simple enough that they can yield effective results very quickly.

There are many, many methods of hypnosis and self-hypnosis. For a long time, some researchers used a kind of statistical approach to studying hypnosis. That is, they would take one method of inducing trance and apply it to a large group of test subjects. The results, invariably, would "prove" that only a percentage of the "population" were "good hypnotic subjects." In fact, all that was really demonstrated was that that particular method of hypnosis was effective with a percentage of the population. In the 1960s and '70s, a medical doctor named Milton H. Erickson began publishing papers on his inquiries into hypnotherapy. Erickson proposed a new model of hypnosis that suggested that trance states could be accessed quickly and easily in everyone by using flexible trance inductions that developed a biofeedback loop between the therapist and patient. That is, Erickson would incorporate observable aspects of the client's experience and feed them back to the client in a variety of ways. He would, for instance, match the rhythm of his voice to the client's breathing or heart rate, while describing with his language other verifiable aspects of the client's experience, such as the way they were sitting, any movements they made, what they were looking at, etc. The observable aspects could then be tied to less verifiable "leading" suggestions, for instance, Erickson might gently slow the rhythm of his

speech while saying, "As you breathe... like this... you can become... more relaxed." The tendency is for the patient to follow into the suggested states.

Erickson's techniques can be applied to self-hypnosis as well as the therapist/client situation. The following is a simple method of self-hypnosis that can be learned and practiced quickly:

Sitting comfortably, with eyes open or closed, list (to yourself) three things which you can see, then three things which you can hear, then three things which you can feel (for example, "I see the color of the wall, I see the person opposite me, I see the color of her hair, I hear the sounds outside the room, I hear people moving about, I hear my own breathing, I feel the cushion underneath me, I feel the air on my skin, I feel my hands on my lap..."). Then narrow it down to a list of two things in each sensory mode, then one thing in each mode. Tell yourself, "As I count from ten down to one, I can go into a deep, comfortable trance." Then count breaths backwards from ten to one and enjoy the trance that you are drifting into. This works most powerfully when the verbal listing within your head is timed in a rhythm with your breathing.

These simple methods can provide some experience of what hypnosis is all about,

but barely touch the surface in terms of the depth and power of recent explorations of hypnosis. The field as a whole is becoming widely recognized as a useful technique in medical, dental and psychotherapeutic settings. Research has been done with hypnosis as a form of pain control, habit control, increasing performance, achieving goals, and in many other areas.

The status of hypnosis varies from state to state. Some states have recently passed legislation regulating the practice or requiring licensing or accreditation for practitioners. If you choose to explore the option of working with a hypnotherapist, it would be best to learn what requirements are mandated by your state, and to find out what accreditation the practitioner has. It should be noted that even in states that require accreditation, some accreditation organizations require only a weekend seminar to certify members, while others require years of study. Some active certification organizations include the National Guild of Hypnotists, The National Board of Hypnotherapist Examiners (who provide the Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist or CCH certification), The Society of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), and the American Council of Hypnotist Examiners.

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Hypnosis and Meditation

I'm often asked if there's a difference between self-hypnosis and meditation. It's a simple question on the surface, but there are so many different forms and techniques in both categories that it's tough to make more than a general comparison. Nonetheless, while the boundary between self- hypnosis and meditation might not be clearly delineated, I think it is possible to make a distinction.

Both hypnosis and meditation can produce states of deep relaxation, both can claim a wide range of similar health benefits, but the routes to what might be a similar destination are a bit different. In meditation, the conscious awareness of the practitioner is called into play. That is, the meditator intentionally focuses his or her mind on something in particular: a symbol, a candle flame, a mantra, the rhythm of the breath, or an overall awareness of the environment. In most forms of hypnosis, the practitioner may begin with some conscious focus of attention, for instance counting, visualizing, gazing at something, but as the trance is

induced, the conscious concentration becomes less important. Concentration may continue, but it is not necessary to the experience. In fact, when I'm in session with my clients, I usually offer the suggestion that "it's not necessary to listen to my voice" (which suggests that consciously they may drift off however they choose, but unconsciously they will, hopefully, still be "listening"). Please remember that this is a general tendency, and there are multiple exceptions to every rule.

While many people initially begin meditating for well-defined reasons, perhaps a particular spiritual goal or something as practical as physical relaxation, the practice is usually less goal- directed than hypnosis. Indeed, more experienced meditators often discover that a key to practice is "meditating for the sake of meditating," practicing simply for the experience of practicing. The expressed purpose of meditation in many different systems is the quieting of the conscious mind, the general chatter and parade of images, sounds, and feelings that constantly occupy our minds throughout the day. Concentrating on a goal or objective, even, paradoxically, the objective of quieting your mind, will itself constitute a break in concentration from the object of meditation.

With that principle difference between meditation and hypnosis noted, I would suggest that meditation is among the most useful things a hypnotherapist can study or practice. The ability to pass along simple meditation techniques to your

clients can extend the range of effective modalities that you offer. Once a client has experienced the state of relaxation or quiet produced by meditation, that state can be incorporated into behavior modification in numerous ways. For instance, a client can be taught to meditate or experience a state similar to that induced by meditation, instead of having a violent reaction, smoking, drinking, or any other habit or situational behavior that is associated with stress. The act of meditating can be linked to the situation using hypnotic suggestion.

That's probably the most overt benefit for your clients. The benefits for you are more subtle and varied, but nonetheless of great possible usefulness. Meditation is a wonderful way to explore the functioning of your own mind, and by extension, the way that human minds in general tend to operate. When you begin to meditate, to hold your attention on the object of your meditation, the conscious mind starts to squirm around and begins to offer a seemingly endless exhibition of distractions, ranging from verbal commenting in your head to full-tilt, technicolor, surround- sound daydreams. The content of these breaks in concentration can provide important clues about what kinds of thoughts are normally flowing just beneath the surface of your mind. Meditators are usually encouraged to take note of their "breaks," acknowledge and accept them, then consciously return to the object of meditation.

I often get letters from beginning meditators to the effect of, "I'm attempting to do the meditation, but every time I try, my mind fills up with distracting thoughts." My response is, invariably, "That means you're doing it right. Keep practicing."

With practice, eventually the frequency of "breaks" diminishes and other states of consciousness become more prominent (some of which will be discussed in future columns here). For a hypnotherapist, having command of relaxed and alert states of mind, at will, is a wonderful tool to help prepare for client sessions and to unwind after the session. Meditating briefly between client sessions is like clearing your palate between courses of a meal - it allows you to pay attention to what is happening in the present, with your client, and eliminate lingering or distracting thoughts from the previous session. A relaxed and perceptive demeanor is a quick way to gain the confidence of your clients.

In terms of inducing trance, I heartily subscribe to the Ericksonian-influenced school of thought that suggests that the trance state begins in the consciousness of the hypnotist, that you create the experience in yourself first, then pass it along to your client. With that in mind, exploring a range of meditative states (and there is a rather extensive range of them) can add to your repertoire of experiences that you can provide for your clients. From the basic level of adding an additional stress-free and relaxed component to your work, to the exploration of extremely

deep, unique, spiritual, or even mystical states, you can, in effect, convert your own powerful experiences into something accessed via trance induction.

We'll be discussing various forms of meditation in this space in future issues, but for now I'd like to offer the suggestion that meditation can be extremely simple. Indeed, very often, the simpler the practice, the better. A very simple Zen meditation can be practiced safely by everyone. Simply sit in a position with your spine vertical and straight (a chair will do nicely). Allow your breathing to become relaxed and natural. Let it set its own rhythm and depth, however it is comfortable. Focus your attention on your breathing, on the movements of your chest and abdomen rather than on your nose and mouth. Keep your attention focused on your breathing. For some people an additional level of concentration may be helpful. You might add a simple counting rhythm, spoken in your head as you breathe: "One" on the inhale, "Two" on the exhale, and repeat. Or you might visualize your breath as a swinging door, swinging in on the inhale and out on the exhale.

Other thoughts, images, sounds, or feelings will likely arise, distracting you from your concentration on your breath. Take note of these thoughts, observe them briefly, then return to your concentration. Begin with a time that is comfortable for you, then increase that time. It helps to do your meditation at the same time and place each day, on a regular schedule, although there is something to be said

for meditating on an "as needed" basis, too. Concentration often becomes easier as you practice, with noticeable results of relaxation and lasting calm even after just a few days.

Keeping a written record of a meditation practice - noting when you meditate, for how long, what you experienced during the meditation, any breaks in concentration, etc. - is a valuable practice. This can help you to determine what factors contribute to the most interesting states of consciousness, and adding as much detail as possible to your description will give you important clues later toward modeling the meditative states through hypnotic methods (more on that in future columns!).

Hypno-Meditation?

In past issues, this column has examined hypnosis and meditation quite separately. We've compared and contrasted, and suggested how parallel practices of hypnosis and meditation can benefit each other. Some of you may have already come to the next question: **What happens if you experience both hypnosis and meditation at the same time?**

I discovered the answer to that question by accident, many years ago. When I was in college, I spent a lot of time figuring out how to meditate and work with a variety of esoteric practices, while I also attended classes and studied. In my junior year, I was working through a set of meditation and ritual practices that I had discovered in the back pages of a well-known text on ceremonial magick. The meditation was described as a technique for "drawing all to a point." Of four methods listed for that particular end, one was a form of chakra meditation that appealed to my interest in yoga. The technique involved transferring the responsibility for sensory awareness to the "Ajna" chakra, which is located in the

center of the head, behind the middle of the forehead, the chakra sometimes referred to as "the third eye." The instructions included directions of this kind:

"The beginner must first practise breathing regularly through the nose, at the same time trying hard to believe that the breath goes to the Ajna and not to the lungs... "Walk slowly in a quiet place; realise that the legs are moving, and study their movements. Understand thoroughly that these movements are due to nerve messages sent down from the brain, and that the controlling power lies in the Ajna. The legs are automatic, like those of a wooden monkey: the power in Ajna is that which does the work, is that which walks. This is not hard to realise, and should be grasped firmly, ignoring all other walking sensations. Apply this method to every other muscular movement.... "Try to transfer all bodily sensations to the Ajna, e.g., "I am cold" should mean "I feel cold", or better still, "I am aware of a sensation of cold" --- transfer this to the Ajna, "the Ajna is aware", etc.... " Finally, strive hard to drive anger and other obsessing thoughts into the Ajna. Try to develop a tendency to think hard of Ajna when these thoughts attack the mind, and let Ajna conquer them. Beware of thinking of 'My Ajna'. In these meditations and practices, Ajna does not belong to you; Ajna is the master and worker, you are the wooden monkey." (Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, London, 1929)

I practiced this as continuously as I possibly could for a couple of days, while going about the usual daily routine of a college student. I went to classes, meals, and so forth, while carrying out the meditation instructions as best as possible. On the third day of this meditation, I went to my "Chinese and Japanese Philosophy" class. The professor was an interesting character who was more interested in giving the class a taste of Zen experience than subjecting us to the history of Asian thought. To that end, rather than have us meditate in class, he guided us into awareness of the present through Ericksonian trance induction (though he did not describe it as such until years later, when a fellow student cornered him at a party and questioned him about it). On that day, his trance instructions were a listing of sensory details: "As you sit here now, you can hear my voice, and the sounds coming from the hallway, and feel the chair beneath you, and see the quality of light in the room, etc."

So there I was, still taking each sensory detail and transferring it to the ajna chakra, and there was my professor, deliberately listing sensory details in a hypnotic voice. Wham! Something fairly indescribable happened then and, indeed, everything did in fact draw to a single point of consciousness. At that time, it was one of the more remarkable states of consciousness that I had encountered through meditation - and there was no question that my professor's trance induction was a major catalyst.

Many years later, when I began leading group trance sessions on a regular basis, I gradually started incorporating meditation practices into what I offered participants. Chakra meditations similar to the "Ajna" meditation proved particularly effective for my groups. (Martial artists take note: that same meditation works very, very well with the "hara" or "tan-tien.") Even more effective, however, is a practice that I call "Chasing the tail."

Chasing the tail is a simple meditation of self-observation. Sit quietly and pay attention to where your thoughts arise. When you think something, anything, the thoughts appear to come from a particular location in space, usually somewhere in your head or somewhere in your body, though occasionally a thought may seem to arise outside the physical body. Just note where the thought arises and let all other thoughts fall from your mind. As each new thought arises, just note where it comes from. If you have thoughts about the practice itself, note where they come from. If you have thoughts about noting where a thought came from, note where that thought came from. Got it? Like a cat chasing its own tail, you turn your consciousness back on itself.

Chasing the tail is a great practice all by itself and it is a wonderful practice to have groups or individuals work with while you lead them through a detailed sensory-based trance induction. I often suggest that workshop participants practice this while I lead the group through variations of my "Into the

Unconscious Mind" trance induction. This induction starts with sensory details that are verifiable in the present and then gradually widens its scope to include as many influences on the present moment as be considered. The meditation practice provides a framework and focus for the plethora of sensory details that arise from the hypnotic induction.

Either the meditation or the trance induction will induce a profound altered state by itself - but the combination produces incredible results with extreme rapidity. Participants have reported such things as "total ego loss," "dissolution of boundaries," and "something I've been trying to accomplish for years," among other descriptions I've received afterwards.

I think this kind of hypnosis/meditation combination is a wide-open field. The variations and combinations are probably endless. My own experiments have been limited to inductions that elicit richness of sensory detail combined with meditations that focus or utilize these details in some way. I'm sure there are many other ways to experiment with this kind of work. Obviously, it is best suited to work with groups or with a partner, but individuals can practice on their own by recording their inductions and playing them back as they meditate in particular ways, simply choosing an appropriate recorded induction that you may have in your collection.

I would be happy to hear from anyone who has experimented in similar ways, or who knows of traditional practices that incorporate such combinations.

Asana: Your Body is Your Mind

Newcomers to meditation are often either fascinated or intimidated by the idea of "asana," the postures and positions used during practice. These range from the classic cross-legged sitting positions, lotus and half-lotus, to the complicated and dynamic stretches of hathayoga. Almost every school of meditation teaches specific postures for practice and while there are some commonalities between them, there is also a huge amount of diversity.

Some schools of meditation require the student to master asana as a separate skill prior to the actual practice. Some schools of meditation are about sitting, exclusively. If you've ever simply attempted to sit very still for an extended period of time, you already understand the basic challenge. As with every other form of meditation concentration, the distractions and temptations start quickly and usually get much worse before they begin to abate: itches, aching muscles, twitches, cramps, fidgeting and much more arise to seemingly torment you from your position.

I usually ask beginning meditation students to use a chair and simply sit with the spine straight. A straight and erect spine is a common factor among the seated postures used in many different kinds of meditation. Later, if their interest grows, they can learn other asanas and perhaps find one that suits them even more. Even the chair posture can be a challenge at first, indeed, once you learn a traditional asana you'll realize that these were designed to encourage proper posture and, once you get used to them, are much more stabile than our usual concept of sitting on furniture.

So what's the point of encouraging particular postures during meditation? There are factors both practical and esoteric. Sitting with a straight spine allows for greater expansion of the chest and fuller, deeper breathing during meditation. And the position that our body is in both reflects and affects our consciousness. If you know someone well enough, you can tell what kind of mood she might be in, maybe even what she is thinking, from the way she slouches or stands tall. And similarly, standing, stretching, moving, lying down, or whatever you choose, can easily break or influence a state of consciousness.

That the position of our body, which muscles are tensed or relaxed, what part of our bones are supporting weight, which internal organs are experiencing pressure or expansion, is related to our state of consciousness is a simple and sometimes even obvious concept with wide ramifications. It is a concept that is even coded

into our language. The word “attitude” means both “position” and “state of mind.” That’s no coincidence, I believe, but a metaphoric appreciation of the implicit link between mind and body.

Hypnotists and NLP practitioners may have a greater appreciation of this than most, as we are frequently called upon to observe the attitude of clients, often in minute ways. After a while we learn to calibrate various states by observing changes in posture, breathing, and general position. And the more obvious changes resulting from mental states are our set of ideomotor movements, tests and signals.

I strongly encourage practicing the traditional asanas. It is a way of establishing rapport with the lineage of meditators that stretches back to the dawn of history. It is a way of taking part in mental states that may have been enjoyed by the sages of ancient time. And these asanas have been developed and honed for centuries. They work as practical enhancements to meditation. I also strongly advocate exploring postures and attitudes that are unique to you, self-generated expressions of your consciousness.

This can be a simple process. One possible method for exploring your own relationship between attitude and attitude is as follows:

1. Sitting or standing, recall a time when you had a powerful, positive experience of some kind – perhaps a moment of great pleasure, or a feeling of confidence, or a moment when you felt perfectly relaxed and in harmony.

2. Remember the visual components of this experience: what colors were in your field of vision, whether you could see movement or stillness, whether it was light or dark, and anything else you can recall.

3. As you recall what you saw, remember what you heard during this experience: sounds or silence, voices or tones, rhythms or noises, background sounds, and anything else you may have been able to hear.

4. As you remember what you saw and heard, remember what you felt during this experience: notice where in your body the feeling begins and where it moves to as the feeling develops. Notice what kind of feeling it may be, pressure, temperature, movement, texture, or whatever it was that you felt.

5. Give the feeling a color or colors. “If this feeling were a color, what would it be?” Apply the color to wherever you feel the feeling so that you end up with a colored map of the sensation in your body.

6. Make the color brighter, richer, more vibrant, or whatever also makes the feeling more intense. For most people and most feelings, making the color brighter or more vibrant will increase the feeling, although for some people and some feelings making the color more muted or dimmer will increase the feeling. Use what works for you.

7. Breathe deeply and make or imagine the color flowing through more and more of your body.

8. Feel how the feeling has intensified. Savor it.

9. Take a deep breath and then express the feeling as a gesture or movement.

10. Some time later, make the gesture or movement and learn how much of the memory, state, or feeling is attached to the gesture.

Over time, exploring a range of such relationships between body and mental state can serve as a long-term meditation on the connection between mind and body. A catalog of such self-generated movements, gestures, and postures will also serve as a collection of anchors that are useful in re-activating these states at appropriate moments.

Hypnosis and Ch'i

The study of meditation often crosses over into the belief systems of the cultures in which the meditative forms originated. Very often these beliefs are unfamiliar, conflicting, and perhaps not very useful for modern practitioners in "Western" societies. Examples of these might be devotion to various deities or acceptance of particular creation myths. However, there is one concept that remains a constant across so many different forms of meditation, martial arts, and healing practices that it deserves some examination, not perhaps in terms of "truth," but in terms of "usefulness." That belief is the idea of a "life force energy," called "ch'i" in Chinese systems, "ki" in Japanese systems, "prana" in Indian systems, and various other names in other practices.

There are those who take ch'i to mean a kind of cosmic energy that pervades everything. Fritjof Capra in "The Tao of Physics," relates ch'i to the quantum

field, describing both as “a tenuous and non-perceptible form of matter.” The Eastern sources, however, are almost bewildering in the diversity of definitions applied to ch’i. Ch’i is the life force energy, but it is also “inner energy,” “intrinsic energy," and, most provocatively from the point of view of a hypnotist, “focus of attention."

Ch’i is something that is presently undetectable by Western scientific methods (or, at least, generally accepted Western scientific methods) and is often relegated to the category of “pseudoscience” or “superstition” otherwise reserved for such antique concepts as “ether” and “psychic vibrations.” Oddly enough, though, we do have some concepts very much like ch’i that are generally accepted, at least on a conversational level, if not on a mainstream scientific level. We usually accept the idea that “willpower” or “will to live” can make the difference between success and failure, survival and death in many situations. We often accept that some people can influence others simply “by force of will”, “power of belief”, or “energy level.” (I.e. “His level of energy is so high that he inspires everyone around him!")

Whatever you presently believe about ch’i, the really exciting part of this is that the power of harnessing ch’i is demonstrable. In many Aikido schools the phenomenon of the “unbendable arm” is practiced (along with numerous other

similar tests of “ki”). To really understand how this works, you’ll need to visit an Aikido school and have someone demonstrate, but, very simply this is a test of the strength of the elbow joint of one arm while its owner is in various states of concentration and muscular tension. The arm is extended and placed on the shoulder of the “tester,” allowing for a slight curve in the arm. The fingers are extended. The “tester” then places both hands above the elbow of the arm and puts weight on the arm, attempting to bend it. Aikido students quickly discover that a simply relaxed arm, or an arm with muscles tensed to resist the test, are not nearly as strong and unbendable as when the “testee” breathes, relaxes, and imagines energy flowing through the arm, out the fingertips, and beyond arm and hand. Is there “really” energy flowing through the arm? It doesn't really matter - the experiment works time and time again.

I think there is a very simple way to understand ch’i that is both appealing and useful to the hypnotist. In this model, ch’i is the “energy” of consciousness itself. It is the “focus of attention” and all that includes - the pictures that people create and look at both internally and externally, the sounds and voices they listen to internally and externally, the feelings they are aware of both internally and externally, and the tastes and smells they can either experience or imagine. Is this starting to sound a little more familiar and down-to-earth?

As hypnotists, this is the stuff we deal with on a daily basis. Our clients come in,

sit down in the trance chair and start to tell us about how they organize their consciousness. If you pay attention, you quickly learn that they sort images (and sounds and feelings) in space around them and inside them. While they (and you) may not characterize these images as such, they pretty closely match the various phenomena ascribed to ch'i. That is, if a person's attention is fixed in one area of their body, they will manifest symptoms, abilities, weaknesses, and strengths directly related to how they are visualizing that body part. If a person's attention is fixed outside the body, and spread out over a number of different visualizations, they will, as you might expect, act scattered, "spaced out," or "uncentered." If they are strongly focused on a particular activity or subject, they will tend to have strong abilities (or weakness) in that activity, depending on how and what their visualization includes.

The Eastern systems of meditation and martial arts have extremely refined methods for focusing ch'i - that is, for directing attention in useful ways. While much of this has not been verified (or even tested, for that matter) by Western science, it has been practiced and studied in the East for thousands of years. In Yoga, for instance, the chakras mark areas of the body in which energy (prana) can be concentrated by meditation, with specific effects derived by that practice. If you focus and maintain your attention, for instance, in the heart chakra, you will develop abilities, experiences, and states of consciousness that are consistent

with other people who similarly concentrate their attention. In Chinese systems, the meridians also mark flows and localizations of ch'i in the body. If an acupuncturist's needle draws consciousness to a particular point on a meridian, consistent effects will be produced.

Aikidoists practice bringing the energy and attention to the body's center of gravity, called the hara, a spot inside the body about an inch or two below the navel. The hara becomes the center of a sphere that surrounds the body. Many of the movements are designed to draw your opponent out of their own sphere and into the influence of yours. Whether or not the "energy" of ch'i really exists in a tangible or currently measurable way, aikido practitioners quickly learn that the martial techniques are dramatically more effective when such concentration is applied.

It might be an enjoyable exercise to add a ch'i practice of some sort to your own meditation. First note where you habitually place your attention. Is it concentrated in one area or areas? Is it all over the place? Does it form a particular shape? Is it more in some parts of your body than others? Once you've mapped where you usually keep your ch'i, you can experiment by surrounding yourself with imaginary geometric figures - cubes, spheres, pyramids - and let your awareness, the aura of your perception and attention, take those shapes. Do you experience

different subjective feelings? Do you have different kinds of thoughts while using different shapes? Are some shapes easier for your to practice with than others? Do factors like symmetry and balance play a part in how the shapes feel?

Again, this is a huge subject that will likely merit more exploration here in the future. I hope that this little bit, here and now, will be suggestive of ways in which this concept can be applied to the many and varied things that you do.

Magick and the Ritual Frame

What do you think of when you read the term “magick”? Witches performing spells? Medieval ceremonialists in hooded robes? Stage illusionists pulling bunnies out of hats? Special effects from fantasy films? Some force that you believe or don’t believe in? Allow me to ask you to set those mythic ideas aside for now. While this discussion may eventually wind its way back to the realm of the remarkable, I’d like to start in a much more familiar place.

The broadest definition of magick was offered in the early 20th Century by the occultist Aleister Crowley who suggested that magick was “the art and science of causing change in conformity with will.” (Crowley was also responsible for returning the “K” to the spelling of “magick,” to distinguish the mental and spiritual discipline from stage illusion.) For the purposes of our immediate discussion, I’d like to narrow that down a little further and say that magick is the art and science of using ritual technology to cause change. In short, the work of

the magician is to do whatever is necessary to create an altered state that results in change and a desired outcome. Sound familiar? From this point of view, the boundary between hypnosis as we know it and magick as we might learn to accept it is somewhat vague. The essential difference that I'll offer here is the concept of a "ritual frame."

We encounter ritual frames every day. Ritualizing seems to be a fundamental human behavior, something we use and experience in many aspects of our lives. For instance, if you choose to have a romantic dinner with someone special, there's a particular ritual that you may use to enhance the situation, create an altered state, and achieve the desired outcome of romance. No "love spell" is necessary to perform this magick - the ritual is simply to ensure that every aspect of the situation is aligned with the goal: the lights are dimmed, the candles lit, the champagne chilled, the food perfect, the music soft and suggestive. If you get that ritual right, then an altered state is produced - a comfortable sharing, perhaps - and your desired outcome - romance - is achieved. This ritual can be repeated with variations to achieve a romantic effect time after time.

Similarly, most of us have rituals that we use to prepare for a day of work with our clients. Personally, I shower, meditate for a short while, eat a light breakfast, put on some presentable clothes, and make sure my office is clean and ready. I

repeat that ritual each time I want to enter the state of mind necessary to engage in my work. And then there's yet another ritual frame that is created when your client walks through the door - the way you greet him or her, the pre-session talk, any changes you make in the lighting or music, the invitation to sit in the trance chair, and so on. Formal trance induction and NLP methods also often involve ritual frames that provide a setting for the content of the session. We each develop the ritual frames that work best for us.

Just as the Ericksonian definition of hypnosis suggests that "Trance permits the operator to evoke in a controlled manner the same mental mechanisms that are operative spontaneously in everyday life," we may find that magick is subject to a very similar definition. The mental mechanisms, however, may have a slightly different emphasis, with magick being more concerned with our ability to create ritual frames "in a controlled manner."

The examples I've just given - romance and preparation for work - are common and naturally-occurring uses of ritual. A glance at a medieval grimoire (magical textbook or collection of rituals), however, will offer up rituals that are perhaps not quite so easily understood. Ancient languages form chants and calls that are embellished with symbolic gestures, actions, sounds, and images. One of the explanations for the arcane qualities of these rituals is simply that these ritual

actions had more natural meaning in the context of the medieval world. While some of the elements may seem bizarre to those of us living in the 21st Century, they may have been more familiar to the clerics and alchemists of the Dark Ages. There's more, however. Most of the rituals found in old texts like "The Keys of Solomon" or "The Sacred Magick of Abramelin the Mage" had very specific and very intense purposes. The idea was to create altered states of singular depth and utility.

Here's another point of commonality with hypnosis. While some rituals definitely had consciously directed purposes (not unlike the "romance" example above), the forms that were described as "High Magick" were more interested in connecting the conscious mind with that part of the unconscious variously referred to by ritualists of yore as "the high self," "the perfected self," or "the Holy Guardian Angel." Like the "benevolent unconscious" found in some models of hypnosis, the "perfected self" was understood as an intelligence above and beyond the normal ego-consciousness with a much greater understanding of the unique purpose and direction of the individual. Outcomes of ritual work would ultimately be generated from contact with that level of the unconscious. Just as some of the outcomes of hypnotherapy may seem miraculous to the uninitiated, the results of these powerful rituals could definitely seem like... well, magick.

Some readers of this article may be aware that, a few years back, I published a book on ritual magick, “FutureRitual: Magick for the 21st Century.” The text was an exploration of elements of ritual technology using concepts drawn from NLP and hypnosis as a method of explaining how the ritual elements worked. As I worked my way through a variety of traditional rituals, stripping them down to component parts that could be understood in terms of neurolinguistics, I became increasingly convinced of the essential unity between magick and hypnosis. (Perhaps the main difference is that magick is usually performed by the individual for personal benefit and hypnosis is often defined by the hypnotist-subject relationship. The tools, however, bear strong parallels.) These fields of consciousness exploration remained separate down through the ages due to a lack of understanding and sharing between practitioners. Now, however, I’m witnessing a growing interest in magick among hypnotists and NLPers, and a rapidly expanding understanding of trance and hypnosis among traditional practitioners of magick.

Anyway, the point of all this just now is to introduce some concepts and terms that will come in handy as this column returns to the theme of meditation in coming months. In the meantime, think about the use of ritual frames in your own life and work and perhaps you’ll find a glimpse of magick.

Internal Rapport

As practitioners in most forms of hypnosis recognize, rapport is an essential component in eliciting an altered state in others. Even in self-hypnosis, creating a feedback loop between your perceptions and breathing - a state of rapport between conscious and unconscious mind - can be a powerful method for exploring trance states. The same holds true for meditation, although the role of rapport may not be quite as obvious.

Rapport, as I'm going to use the term here, suggests a state of attunement, an experience in which different systems or different parts of the same system fall into step. This is obvious and highly noticeable in the pacing-and-leading strategies of NLP or Ericksonian work in which the hypnotist matches some aspect of the subject's behavior and continues to "pace" until behaviors and states are harmonized enough that a change in the hypnotist's behavior will "lead" the subject into a new state or behavior. This is also a component in the effectiveness

of sound and light devices. In that context, rapport is sometimes referred to as "entrainment." The goggles and headphones blink and beep in rhythms that may match certain brainwave frequencies. After a short time (and especially if the program running on the machine begins with frequencies closer to normal, waking consciousness) the brainwave frequencies of the subject begin to fall in step with the blinks and beeps. Many "brain machine" users report that after a while they are able to access these states at will, without the machine, and often do so spontaneously throughout the day. By "entrainment," consciousness has learned the states in ways that make them accessible later.

While the operator/subject dynamic is less common in meditation, it is still observable in some situations. The best way to learn meditation, of course, is in the presence of an experienced meditator. By practicing breathing patterns, mantras, asanas, or just about any aspect of meditation, along with a teacher who has mastered these techniques, a natural state of rapport can develop. Simply by performing the same behaviors as the instructor, in the same rhythms, provides the basic element of attunement, and allows the student to follow into the meditative state. This is probably most observable in forms of meditation in which verbal instruction is kept to a minimum and emphasis is on "sitting correctly" (as in Zazen) or moving with attention (as in Aikido or Tai Chi). The student simply strives to follow along with the physical aspects of the behavior as

best as possible and the states, while rarely described by the teacher, flow spontaneously from the practice and from the non-verbal rapport between teacher and student. Once these states are experienced in this way, the student will have much better success experiencing them in solo practice. This is also a very practical process for the hypnotherapist who would like to include meditative states as part of the repertoire of experiences for clients; pacing and leading can help your clients achieve these experiences, but only if you have developed the states in yourself first.

Just as rapport may play a role between levels of consciousness in self-hypnosis, the same phenomenon of attunement is important in solo meditation. While the aim of some forms of meditation (Zazen, for instance) may be a state of consciousness described as “no-mind,” most meditation begins with some form of self-observation. In some forms, as described in previous columns in this space, the entry point is observation of breathing. This practice can provide a synchronization or attunement between conscious experience (perception of the breathing) with unconscious behavior (the autonomous function of breathing itself). Other forms of meditation include observation of thought processes. As one focuses one's mind on an object of meditation (a mantra, a candle flame, a posture, etc.) various kinds of thoughts begin to arise, considered distractions or “breaks” in concentration. The usual process of meditation is to notice these

breaks, accept them, and return to concentration. Either trying to push them back into unconsciousness or becoming unduly distracted by them may divert your practice. The simple observe/concentrate pattern is, again, a form of pacing and leading, this time between elements of your own consciousness. In time, and with practice, these elements begin to synchronize, fall in step with each other, and the meditative states are experienced.

If you've been following along this far, you may have begun to realize that "attunement between levels of consciousness" is pretty much the same as the NLP concept of "congruence." When each part of your own consciousness is in step and directed toward the same experience or outcome, then that outcome is achieved more directly and fully. So if you are "just sitting," then sit with every part of your being. If you are meditating on a mantra, then lead yourself into meditating with every bit of consciousness.

While I often hesitate to describe the benefits of meditation, as these are very personal experiences that will be different for each practitioner, in broad terms one might say "rapport with self" or "congruence of consciousness" are desired outcomes. At this point we come to another very important aspect of meditation, daily practice. Just as brain machine users find that the altered states experienced via sound and light frequencies become, with repetition, spontaneous or easily

replicable, many meditators find that, over time, the calm and “congruence of consciousness” that they experience become part of daily life, outside the context of formal meditation. Simply the experience of new states of consciousness may make them potentially replicable, but the ongoing process of developing “internal rapport,” pacing and leading oneself, can make them not only replicable, but common.

So the moral of this story is that if you intend to explore consciousness with meditation, you need to be as patient with yourself as you would with a hypnosis client. Allow the meditation to develop internal rapport in whatever time that takes and allow the experiences to flow from that state of congruence. There are few shortcuts to real meditative states of consciousness, but beginning with the practices of observation and development of internal rapport will take you there as quickly as humanly possible.

Modeling Meditative States

In previous installments of this column, I've stressed some of the distinctions between meditation and hypnosis. Some of us, I know, strongly suspect that hypnosis can take you anywhere that meditation can. Dedicated NLPers sometimes debate the merits and possibilities of accessing meditative states by the process of modeling. Is this possible? Can a well-conducted trance induction take a subject into the same kinds of states as one might obtain from prolonged meditation practice?

Yes and no. For most people, there is simply no concept of what these states feel like, look like, or sound like, prior to meditation experience. As I have repeatedly stressed here, if you want to lead a subject into an altered state, you need to have a comprehensive and experiential understanding of that state yourself. You need to be able to develop it in yourself before you can offer it to another.

As well, it seems that many aspects of meditative experience derive from repetition. Recent neurological experiments have demonstrated that changes in brain activity occur with repetition of concentration on a mantra or similar meditative objective. To summarize very briefly, a feedback loop is created between the prefrontal cortex, the thalamus and the limbic system. As the prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain apparently related to concentration, becomes more active as a result of repetition, the thalamus and limbic system begin to act as regulators, shutting down further sensory input that might over-stimulate the cortex. This creates the state of sensory withdrawal and intense focus of concentration known in the yogic system as “pratyahara.” Pratyahara is an essential precursor to states of “union” or samadhi that can result from long-term meditation practice. Judged on the basis of this kind of research, repetition and practice seem to be essential components.

With that said, there are many aspects of meditative experience that can be conveyed person-to-person. Traditionally, the experience of “darshan,” face-to-face meeting with a guru or spiritual figure, was intended to transmit some experience directly, that could not otherwise be expressed in words. I will testify that I have had some encounters with spiritual teachers and experienced meditators that went well beyond what could be accounted for by the content of

our conversation. (Indeed, one of the most memorable of such encounters was with a tribal priestess from Zimbabwe who spoke very little English. Twenty minutes of attempting to converse with her yielded little that I didn't already know about her practices - but at the same time I entered a very powerful and interesting altered state that took nearly an hour to fade, after leaving her presence!) Whether some non-verbal form of trance induction is involved is a matter of debate, but to me that seems the most probable explanation.

In their book “Change Your Mind... And Keep the Change,” Steve and Connirae Andreas outline a method of “Accessing Kinesthetic States” that is occasionally taught by some NLP trainers as the “Drug of Choice Pattern.” While most often applied to the task of accessing drug-induced states without the drugs, the method can be applied to almost any altered state that involves a strong kinesthetic component. To summarize simply, the kinesthetic component of the state is recalled in small “chunks.” The subject is led to contemplate what kind of feelings occur, where in the body, with what kind of intensity, and how the feelings progress as the state intensifies. The shifts in kinesthetic submodalities tend to elicit changes in visual and auditory experience that often match very closely the full experience of the altered state. Once a kinesthetic sequence is elicited, that sequence can then be modified, or, more pertinently to our topic here, transferred to another person. This is a powerful method of inducing altered states in others,

but whether or not the state is really the same as that experienced in the person from whom it was originally elicited is unknown, due to the subjective nature of altered states in general.

This can be applied to many (but likely not all) forms of meditative experience. The kinesthetic component can be elicited and a sequence created. For instance, one meditator, as s/he enters the meditative state, may experience the following sequence: tension in the pit of the stomach which transforms into a feeling of warmth spreading through the abdomen, followed by a noticeable release in muscle tension in the legs, a relaxing of the facial muscles, a warm feeling around the head, etc. (Note: this is a hypothetical example, not a sequence related to meditation in general.) By running through this kinesthetic sequence, our hypothetical meditator can again access the non-kinesthetic components of the experience. And if our meditator's friend imagines hirself going through the same sequence, s/he too may access some of those components.

Some experienced meditators will argue that deeper meditative states are somehow "beyond perception or senses." This is described in Zen, for instance, as the state of "no-mind." If sensory representational systems are absent, is it possible to model at all? My suggestion is that while the state itself may be inaccessible to modeling, the approach to it might be accessible. That is, while we

can't package up "no-mind," because there's nothing to package, we might, however, be able to find a sequence that eventually leads to that state. Remember that the sequence of kinesthetics represents what happens as the state develops. If we take the sequence right to the brink of "no-mind," perhaps a moment or two of meditation can develop that state.

So, on one hand, we've got evidence that repetition - regular practice - is an important, perhaps essential component of meditation, but on the other hand, it's evident that hypnotic techniques can play a role in accessing these kinds of states. In my opinion, a structured and regular practice can be supported and strongly enhanced with some applied hypnosis and modeling of states. Very similar practices appear in the teacher/student relationships of several meditation traditions and it is likely that such hypnotic support can be effectively translated to our contemporary approaches. Practice and practice some more - but you can allow the spirit of consciousness exploration that excites and inspires hypnotists to be a powerful ally in that practice.

Aikido

Two and a half years ago, an Aikido school opened its doors down the street from my home. Approaching forty and gaining some excess belly-fat from a desk-bound career, I figured this was a great opportunity to get a little regular exercise and drop a few pounds. I knew that Aikido was a Japanese martial art that had a spiritual basis - the “do” at the end of the word is the Japanese form of the Chinese word “Tao,” and signifies a “Way” of spiritual attainment. For a lifelong meditator that added a little incentive - I find gym workouts to be mind-numbing and figured this would be a little more compatible with my interests. Even with that knowledge, what I got when I joined the school was a lot more than I had bargained for, with ramifications that have influenced many areas of my life, including my hypnosis practice. After two and half years, I’m still decidedly in the “beginner” category - you can spend a lifetime learning this art - but I’ve had a few Aikido-related revelations that might prove of interest to Journal readers, hypnotists, and meditators.

While the roots of Aikido derive from ancient Samurai traditions and venerable martial art forms such as jujutsu (empty-handed fighting) and kenjutsu (sword fighting), the art as practiced and taught today was developed in the 20th Century by Morihei Ueshiba, known to Aikido students as "O'Sensei" (Great Teacher). Ueshiba was a legendary fighter in his lifetime (1883-1969). A soldier who taught unarmed combat to the generals of the Japanese army in World War II, he was invincible. But winning every fight was not enough for this deeply spiritual man. He grew tired of fighting just for the sake of fighting. On one occasion, he was challenged by a notable sword fighter but really didn't have the will to fight or hurt anyone that day. He allowed the man to attack him with the sword and, although unarmed himself, he evaded every blow until his opponent tired of the game. After the fight, he went into his garden to rest. There he had a vision in which he became convinced that if he moved in harmony with the universe, there would never be a question of winning or defeat, only increased harmony of everyone involved. Over the remaining years of his life he went on to demonstrate the reality of this premise, performing miraculous feats and developing a martial art that would continue to teach and spread the idea of harmonious action long after his death.

Many students of meditation may be familiar with the idea of "karma yoga."

Usually typified with such statements as “chop wood, carry water,” karma yoga suggests meditation that involves focus and attention to the actions of daily life, engaging fully in the work that one has to do. Commenting on karma yoga and Aikido, Robert Frager writes in the book “Aikido in America” (Frog Ltd., Berkeley, 1995), “[Karma yoga] really is a full discipline of yoga as profound as any other discipline based on the notion that action forms who you are. I think in that sense that Aikido is a very profound way of acting. It’s not at all trivial how you act, and Aikido is a way of acting in accord with one’s entire self, with mind, body and spirit as it should be, in the center. In that sense it’s a very profound kind of karma yoga without a lot of the metaphysics and naming of what it is as a spiritual system.”

In terms of hypnosis and NLP, this translates into the idea that Aikido is metaphor in motion. That is, instead of embodying complex ideas or change work in a verbal story, explanation, or spoken trance induction, transformative concepts are implicit in the movements of Aikido itself. By practicing the techniques you learn not only the obvious - how to defend yourself in a fight - but very powerful ideas that have the potential to change your life outside of the Aikido school. These movement-based metaphors are unusually powerfully; learning them by doing takes them out of the realm of intellectual knowledge and into your muscles, your nerves, and your whole body.

Some of the lessons to be found in Aikido movements may be familiar to NLPers and hypnotists. The basis of almost every movement in Aikido is rapport - described by the concept of “blending.” The techniques make it very clear that to influence another person, you need to move with them rather than against them. Almost all Aikido practice is done with a partner, and one quickly learns that if you don’t have rapport with your partner, the techniques just don’t work. The first part of every technique is similar to the “mirroring” exercises that every NLPer learns in practitioner training. You literally have to adopt the same speed, direction, motion, and, often, stance of your partner in order to throw or pin them. The better you are at blending, the less effort is needed for the actual throw or pin.

Another important lesson implicit in the actions of Aikido is the idea that your focus of attention, where you are looking and what you are thinking about, can produce incredible effects on a physical level. One day our teacher began class not by demonstrating a technique as usual, but asking two of the largest men in the group to grab hold of him and lift. On the first attempt he literally flew up off the mat. That seemed fairly reasonable - he’s an average sized man and the lifters were large. On the second attempt, however, the two men could not get him off the mat at all. To our eyes there was no apparent difference in what our teacher was doing, but he soon explained that the first time he was focusing his attention

above him, on the ceiling, and the second time he was focusing his awareness below him, beneath the mat. Incredulous, we all gave it a try, breaking up into groups and performing the same experiment. After witnessing the same effect repeatedly, we were convinced. The lesson was intended to apply to Aikido techniques, to demonstrate how your own force can be directed and maximized through your attention - but the ramifications of that exercise are pretty broad. Very simply, physical change can occur through a change in attention.

How many different ways can that principle be applied to hypnotherapy? Is a client thinking ahead to his or her future, or constantly focusing on what is behind, in the past? Does a client with relationship problems think about his partner in the present, or is his mind somewhere else when they are together? What focus of attention does a client exhibiting physical symptoms of stress need to adopt to feel better?

Such lessons implied by the movements of Aikido are numerous and can be related to many aspects of hypnosis and meditation. As this column progresses over time, expect Aikido to find a place here, alongside the more sedentary forms of meditation.

Meditation and the Senses

Some years ago, I was experimenting with spoken-word trance inductions that would lead to states more commonly associated with meditation. When I posted a transcription of one of these hypnotic inductions to an online forum, I received, primarily, two kinds of responses. One came from those who actually experimented with the script and got, pretty uniformly, positive results very much in line with what I had intended. The other kind of response came from students of several traditional schools of meditation who would not even attempt the exercise because they believed any meditation that utilized sensory experience could not lead to mystical awareness. Some of these in the second group were rather vehement, condemning my methods at length.

Given the vast range of meditative technique from the enormous number of traditions worldwide, it is, of course, very difficult to generalize about what “meditation” really might include. Many western forms of meditation, including

those associated with Catholicism, are based very much in practice and exploration of internal sensory experience. The practices of St. Ignatius, for example, revolved around meditations that involved imagining what Christ or other Biblical figures experienced, in as much sensory detail as possible. This kind of practice stands halfway between yogic “dharana” exercises and hypnotic guided visualization.

On the other hand, many eastern schools of meditation seek states in which the conscious mind is stilled, the flow of thoughts and images and sounds and feelings that normally parade through the mind brought into a state of rest so that a primal and undisturbed consciousness, free of conditioned behavior, can shine forth. Some of these schools begin meditative practice by seeking to limit sensory experience, by fixing the attention on a single object, visualization, sound, or feeling. Ascetic principles are offered as a precursor - the student being encouraged to avoid behaviors and sensations that excite the senses. Then the student is given a subject to focus on, a mantra, an image, a sacred object, or a single aspect of present experience, like the rise and fall of the breath. Ultimately, with much dedication and practice, the student is brought to states where all usual aspects of consciousness are shed and a state of pure existence, untainted by the interpretative mind, is attained. In some schools this state is known as “no-mind.”

Note that every one of these techniques, as a rule, begins with some manipulation

of sensory experience. The conscious mind is engaged deliberately, in a way that eventually transcends the normal modes of thought. Ego-consciousness is silenced and yoga, “union,” may be experienced. Please note the last word in the previous sentence. Even though the usual modes of perception and interpretation are “switched off," some part of the mind is still “experiencing” - even though we might not be able to categorize that experience in standard sensory terms (at least not until returning to normal consciousness, when such states become cloaked in the language of metaphor - bright lights, harmonic tones, blissful feelings, etc.).

The point here is that, while it may lead to something else, the practice of any kind of meditation itself remains rooted in sensory experience. In spite of what my online nay-sayers might have suggested, this is far from being meditative heresy. Patanjali, the writer who first codified the practices of yoga approximately two thousand years ago in the “Yoga Sutras," suggests a number of practices that utilize the normal sensory modes of the mind. Patanjali was very much aware of the tendencies of the mind to wander, to become distracted, and to become fragmented, and his techniques were offered as remedy for such states.

Primary among Patanjali’s suggestions is the practice of “vigilant attentiveness” to the activities of the mind that are aroused by sensory experience. This is an essential component of dharana exercises, of concentrating the attention on a

single sensory experience, a mantra, symbol, etc. As we've discussed here before, when a meditator begins the task of holding such an experience singly in the consciousness, the mind tends to demonstrate all of its ability to wander, be distracted, rebel, and so forth. The meditator is advised not to suppress such mental activity, but to observe it and then to return to the focus of the meditation.

Patanjali also recommends meditation on spiritual figures and concepts, particularly adoration of the consciousness of one (living, dead, or mythical) who has transcended the interpretative and conditioned aspects of normal consciousness. He even suggests that one might perform this meditation by adoring the consciousness of newborn babies, who are similarly free of conditioned behavior! Note the similarity here to the Ignatian, Catholic meditation mentioned earlier.

The Yoga Sutras also suggest that deep meditation on the content of dreams is another effective way of transcending ordinary consciousness.

While Patanjali continually warns that the sensory experiences of even the deepest states of union may hold the seeds of renewed distraction and fragmentation, he also suggests that the inner consciousness, freed of conditioning and rationalization, is nonetheless an engine of perception. He compares the

undivided consciousness to a pure crystal “which reflects without distortion or confusion any object that is placed near it, the steady and ever-alert intelligence, too, **receives and** reflects the **color** (nature) of the **subject, the predicate, and the object** in all situations, instantly, spontaneously and appropriately." (Yoga Sutras I. 41, interpreted by Swami Venkatesananda).

There is a danger here - that of confusing the normal-consciousness fantasies and wandering of the mind for the actual transcendent experience. It is that confusion, I suspect, that led to the “no sensory experience” arguments I encountered online.

So what does this mean for hypnotists and consciousness researchers? In short, it strongly suggests that our tools for engaging and altering consciousness - guided experiences, spoken-word trance inductions, use of sensory representational systems and submodalities - are all valid in the quest to understand transcendent consciousness. Can you use hypnosis to explore mystical experience? I say YES. While ultimately we may want to use our hypnotic methods to point the consciousness beyond the range of the methods themselves, that is still very much in line with traditional meditative methods. Think of these suggestions as yet one more direction that you can take your hypnosis and meditation practices, something that both includes and goes beyond the usual therapeutic goals.

Meditation Shortcuts

I tend to say this frequently: There's no substitute for practice and experience. Nonetheless, I'm often asked for "shortcuts" to achieving meditative states. So it's now time for the down-and-dirty, nitty-gritty guide to Meditation for the Patience-Challenged. What follows is a discussion of a few different techniques that will take your practice from Om to Wow in the shortest time possible.

1) The Meditation Marathon - This is sometimes called a "retreat," but it's not necessary to haul your butt up to the Himalayas to hide out and meditate. Your usual meditation-location will do nicely. What this involves is taking a set period of time - a week, for instance - and meditating every available minute. I'm talking about hours of meditation a day - but just for that week. The trick here, as you're probably already considering, is scheduling. You have to clear the time from your schedule well in advance. Turn off the phone, disconnect the TV cable, pull the plug on your computer, and make sure your family and friends can read the Do

Not Disturb sign on your door.

A meditation marathon is based on the idea that the more you do, the more you will learn. By exceeding your usual limits for the marathon week, you'll be able to develop new and powerful resource states that can be accessed again (and again!) when you return to your regular meditation practice. Which brings us to...

2) Anchoring - I'm assuming that most of you have a good idea about anchoring, which is the basis of the post-hypnotic response. A state of consciousness is assigned to a particular stimulus so that in the future, when this stimulus is again experienced, the state will be accessed once again. If you are going to do a meditation marathon - or even in your regular practice - you'll want to know that when you get to those really interesting states, you'll be able to have some way to anchor them and get back there quickly and easily.

Most of the elements of your meditation environment and practice can be used as anchors - if and only if they are consistent and unique. The first and probably most important aspect of this is "asana," the position in which you are sitting when you meditate. This is one reason that traditional meditation teachers insist on very specific ways to sit when meditating. Posture and physiology also have direct effects on consciousness, so by using a good asana when you meditate, you

are covering your bases in a few different ways. In terms of anchoring a state to a position, if you decide to sit in half-lotus, for instance, or in a chair with a straight back, then continue to use that position and only that position when you do that particular meditation practice. Experienced meditators often report that, after years spent meditating in one asana, they are able to access their meditative states and experiences very quickly, simply by sitting in that position again.

Along with asana come other important physical anchors like mudras (yoga hand positions), your mantra or object of concentration itself, and so on. Likewise, other aspects of your practice can serve as anchors, including the clothes that you wear - if you have a particular pair of comfy meditation pants, for instance, and wear those only when meditating, then, after time, putting them on will help you access that state again. If, however, you also wear those clothes to play softball, go shopping, or whatever, then their usefulness as an anchor will greatly diminish.

In a similar vein, lighting, the objects in your field of vision when you sit to meditate, and any music or sounds you hear can also act as anchors, if they are unique and consistent. Olfactory anchors are very powerful, so choosing a particular scent of incense that you use only when meditating will further increase your ability to quickly enter states. All of which brings us to...

3) The Ritual Frame - I've discussed this here before, so dig through your back issues for the complete explanation. The ritual frame refers to the things you do just before your meditation, and the things you do just after. This might include, for instance, taking a shower or bath, dressing in your anchor-clothing, and performing symbolic acts to clear out your meditation space and to separate your mind from distractions. The ritual frame has its own symbolic functions, but also acts as an anchor (or set of anchors) that can help you to access your meditation states more easily. Again, you'll need to be consistent and to use the same ritual frame each time for it to act as a consistent anchor.

4) Self-Hypnotic Preparation - I'm sure some of you experienced hypnotists have already considered this one. It's a very simple idea - at some time other than your scheduled meditation practice, give yourself a self-hypnosis session in which you program your unconscious mind to access resources that will be useful in meditation. These can include, for instance, the power of concentration, the ability to relax muscles, calmness of mind, and so forth. You can future-pace these qualities and attach them as a post-hypnotic experience to one of your consistent, meditation-only anchors.

5) Tips and Tricks - Did you know that it is easy to still your internal dialogue by simply letting your tongue drop away from the roof of your mouth? In general,

meditators are advised to meditate with the tongue against the roof of the mouth, or against the front teeth (there are theories of energy-flow that account for this suggestion) - and that's good advice. But if you find yourself meditating and are distracted repeatedly by internal dialogue, a few minutes of letting your tongue relax and drop away from your teeth and the roof of your mouth can help you get a little bit of internal quiet. Then you can return to your usual tongue-position and practice.

Another nice way of increasing concentration and shutting down internal distractions is to make sure that you are experiencing your object of concentration through as many senses as possible. If your meditation involves a mantra or counting, then also visualize the word or numbers, give it an appropriate color, let the sound of your mantra (even if you do it internally) reflect the meaning or intent of your mantra, and feel the sound of the mantra in your body, perhaps in an appropriate chakra or physical location.

Now... some of you may have noticed by now that all these down-and-dirty shortcuts all represent aspects of traditional practice. There's nothing that I've described here that hasn't been taught by various meditation schools for thousands of years. As usual, there's no substitute for regular practice - but making sure that you are consistent and absolutely congruent in your approach will take you much

further, much faster.

Pranayama - The Art of Breath

Many readers of The Journal are probably familiar with the Ericksonian-derived NLP technique of "pacing" the breathing of your hypnotic subject. In this practice, a trance induction (or any suggestion) is intensified when the hypnotist matches some aspect of his behavior with the rhythm of the subject's breathing. The pacing might occur through the rhythm of the hypnotist's voice, by swaying or moving an arm or leg in that rhythm, or by actually breathing along with your client. The result is a feedback loop that enables the hypnotist to "lead" the subject into different breathing patterns and different states of consciousness.

One of several factors that makes the above practice so effective is that breathing is usually an autonomic function - it is unconscious behavior that everyone always exhibits. By matching the breathing rhythm of the subject, the hypnotist is directly accessing the subject's unconscious mind. No suggestions are necessary to create or stimulate some unconscious motion, ideomotor response, or unusual state for this phenomenon to be accessed - everyone is always breathing.

Breathing can be a direct doorway to the unconscious mind.

The same applies to the personal, self-directed practice of meditation. There is an entire study of "breath control" in yoga called Pranayama, a practice reputed to quell anxiety, elevate mood, and create lasting peace of mind. Prana means both breath and "life force energy" and yama means "control." Almost every school of yoga has their own brand of pranayama, ranging from extremely simple techniques to particularly challenging. The common factor in all of them is that a pattern of behavior that is usually unconscious can easily be subjected to observation and control by the meditator.

By observing your breath, you enter into a rhythm that reflects a range of unconscious associations - your rate and depth of breathing is always affected by your thoughts, your level of stress, your posture, your present external sensory perceptions, how much sleep you've had recently, what and when you last ate, and quite a bit more, all of it usually outside of consciousness. All of that information is encoded in the pattern of the breath. The simple act of observation begins to merge conscious and unconscious elements. As one observes continuously, the pattern of breathing will begin to change, a change that is in turn observed, which creates new conscious/unconscious changes, and so on, an ever-deepening feedback loop.

Basic Breath-Observation Exercise:

Sit in a quiet place with your back straight and your muscles relaxed (a straight and vertical spine allows free movement of the shoulder blades, chest, and diaphragm, allowing your breathing to fully reflect unconscious factors, likewise for relaxed muscles). With eyes open or closed, simply pay attention to your breathing. You can count the breathing, “One” on the inhale, “Two” on the exhale and repeat - or you can imagine your breath as a swinging door, swinging in as you inhale, and swinging out as you exhale. That’s it - just sit and observe. How does the breath feel in your nostrils? In your chest? Does your vision change as your body moves with the breath? How long does an inhalation or exhalation take? How far does the breathing seem to penetrate your body? As your mind wanders (if you are doing this right, believe me, it will wander!) just observe and acknowledge whatever the distracting thought was and return to your observation of breath.

As noted, observation is a form of breath “control” because the act of observation will influence the rate and depth of breathing. However, other forms of pranayama rely on more direct, conscious control. The basis is the Yogic Breath. Your lungs have three main areas: the bottom, which is controlled by movements of the diaphragm and is visible as a rising and falling of the abdomen

("abdominal breathing"); the middle, controlled by expansion and contraction of the rib cage; the top, controlled by rising and falling of the shoulder blades. Each of these different kinds of breathing are associated with different states of consciousness. For purposes of the Yogic Breath, however, the key is simply to fill and empty ALL three of the areas of the lungs. Fill and empty your lungs completely but smoothly, without halting or straining. This is not hyperventilation - it is proper and full breathing, at a relaxed pace.

To start your "control," you can simply practice the Yogic Breath - you can do this at almost any time during the day, when you are driving, walking, sitting, whatever (again, a straight and vertical spine helps). The result is often a state of alert relaxation that can be accessed quickly, any time. (If you are a smoker, chronically stressed out, or have some other respiratory challenge, however, your first experience with the Yogic Breath might be one of dizziness. That's a great indicator that you are habitually limiting your breath and allowing some areas of your lungs to go unused on a regular basis. It's your cue to take action. Quit smoking and start pranayama immediately!)

Once you are comfortable with the Yogic Breath, you can begin to slow it down a bit. Figure out what your usual time for an exhalation or inhalation is, then add one second to it. Let's say that you normally exhale a Yogic Breath for

four seconds - you can now begin to practice pranayama by inhaling for five seconds, holding your breath in for five seconds, then exhaling for five seconds and holding your breath out for five seconds. Five in, five hold, five out, five hold - and repeat. Ten minutes of this is usually sufficient to get a strong trance state or deep relaxation. Longer times of pranayama meditation can add to the lasting effect that it has on your life, the sense of peace and freedom from anxiety staying with you throughout the day.

There are many, many, many more variations on breath control. They come from every school of yoga and Zen meditation, as well as from martial arts, bodywork, and certain schools of psychology. The benefits of pranayama are unlimited. They make excellent, easily learned practices to pass along to your hypnosis clients - and can help you stay relaxed and comfortable in your job. Okay, take a deep breath!

How do you know?

How do you feel right now?

Consciousness flows, ever-changing, from one moment to the next. However minutely or broadly, each nanosecond of experience differs in some way from the preceding one. When we talk about a "state of consciousness," we make a generalization about a collection of such moments, that some aspects of consciousness remain constant, or at least similar, for a period of time. Even so, sensory experience continues its kaleidoscopic change. When we meditate, we ease into a session, first getting comfortable in our posture, then getting into the flow of meditation, then easing back out, aware of comfort or discomfort in our bodies, and turning our attention back outward. Rather than a singular state called "meditation," we may find a continually shifting experience, a process rather than a thing. A hypnotic trance induction has a beginning, middle and end. A psychedelic experience rises and falls as blood levels of chemicals peak and diminish. Sleep is characterized by several stages through the night.

As hypnotists we are often well-trained in the skills necessary to determine if a client is in a trance state. We can watch breathing patterns, lip size, muscle tone, eyelid flutter, eye movement, swallow reflex and many other factors that let us know that a client's state is changing. Many of our clients, however, aren't quite so well trained and may have difficulty in differentiating states of consciousness. It occasionally happens that we are able to observe a client going deeply into a trance or meditative state, and yet they emerge unsure whether or not they have experienced hypnosis or meditation. For the most part, people just never learn the skills to observe their own consciousness. There are, however, some simple tools that you can employ in a hypnosis or meditation session that will help your clients to understand the processes they are experiencing.

The basic tool is calibration. If the client is there to obtain a fairly simple outcome, reduction of stress or a particular bad feeling, it's a simple matter to have him or her assign a number value to the feeling. "If 10 is the worst it has ever been, and 0 is the complete absence of the feeling, what number would you give it now?" By checking the number value before and after an intervention, it allows your client to make a firm determination of what change has been made, as well as giving you a handy reference point to measure your work. Remember that checking before is as important as checking after the intervention so that a

comparison can be made.

If the goal is more subtle, perhaps giving your client the tools to notice and experience general changes in state, trance depth, response to meditation and so on, more complete and subtle calibrations can be employed. The nature of a state may best be understood by paying attention to the differences between one state and the next and the differences from one moment to the next. To notice a difference, we first have to calibrate, to notice where and what we are now. The simplest method is to ask, "What am I experiencing now?"

To calibrate the physiological parameters of a state, we might explore the following:

Physiology

- What position is my body in?
- Am I moving or still? How so?
- What positions are my arms, legs, hands and feet in?
- Is my heartbeat in my conscious awareness? If so, is it fast, slow, strong or weak?
- Is my breathing rapid, slow, even, uneven, shallow, or deep?
- Am I breathing from the upper part, middle, or bottom of my lungs?

- Which of my muscles are in use? Which are relaxed? How in use or relaxed are they?

Once you have determined the answers to these questions, you can change your state and run through the physiology modeling questions again, noting any changes that have occurred. Here's a sample method for altering consciousness:

Expansion and Contraction Breathing – at least 5 minutes

Imagine a circle around yourself, at about the diameter of your outspread arms. Sit or stand in the center of that circle. Fill your lungs completely, with a slow, even inhalation. As you inhale, allow your attention to expand to fill the circle. As you exhale, slowly, evenly, and completely, allow your attention to contract to a single point in the center of your chest. Repeat.

How have the physical parameters of your state changed? Has your position changed? Or your heartbeat, breathing, and musculature?

We can be more precise by identifying and measuring a variety of perceptions, behaviors and beliefs that can help us to define the processes we refer to as states. Here are some more **Modeling Resources** that can be applied to states of every kind:

Sensory-Based Model

- Am I aware more externally or internally?
- How much am I consciously aware in visual mode?
- Do the things I see (with eyes open or closed) seem bright, dim, colorful, distant, close, large, small, shiny, dull, etc.?
- How much am I consciously aware in auditory mode?
- Do the things I hear sound loud, quiet, tonal, rhythmic, vocal, deep, high, distant, close, distinct, fuzzy, etc.?
- How much am I consciously aware in kinesthetic mode?
- Do the things I feel seem tactile, visceral, emotional, proprioceptive, mild, intense, large, small, tingly, pressing, moving, still, warm, cold, etc.?
- How much am I consciously aware in olfactory and gustatory modes?
- Do the things I taste and smell seem intense, mild, pungent, sweet, smoky, musky, fruity, sour, bitter, spicy, etc.?
- Is it easy or difficult to separate one sense from another?
- Are senses represented to consciousness as other senses, that is, sound experienced as color, color experienced as feeling, and so on?

- Am I experiencing from my own point of view, or seeing/hearing/feeling myself as if from someone else's point of view?
- How much am I concerned with how I feel about my sensory experiences?

Energy Flow Model

Track the kinesthetics of the experience as follows:

- Notice where in your body the feeling of the state begins.
- Notice where it moves to as the experience develops towards its peak.
- Pay attention to whether the feeling is moving or static, cycling or pulsing.
- Give the feeling a color. "If this feeling had a color, what would it be?"
- Experiment by making the colored shape brighter, darker, richer, faded, larger or smaller to determine which of these increases the feeling associated with the state.
- Notice any other changes in feeling as well as in what you might see, hear, taste or smell.

Teaching your clients (and yourself!) to notice these kinds of subtle changes in state can make your work easier and your clients happier. Now how do you feel?

Meditation and Memory

In the last issue, we explored the idea that a system in our brains, the "default network," encodes information about our state of consciousness through "submodalities," shifts in perception. We tend to express our likes and dislikes, among much else, through the way we encode submodalities onto memories. The specifics are unique for everyone. In general, though, we might represent memories and things that we like as bigger, closer, brighter, louder, warmer, etc., and memories and things that we don't like as smaller, farther, dimmer, softer, colder, etc. Which qualities represent what is different for everyone; these are just examples.

The default network accomplishes this tagging of memories through a process called "transderivational search." When we experience the state associated with a memory, the tendency is for the brain to flip through a range of memories that all have the same state. This is a common phenomenon in Ericksonian hypnosis, where vague language prompts the mind to search through stacks of memories,

like shuffling through a deck of cards, until one is selected. (This is a major part of the process in the Ericksonian method, which allows the subject to explore states and fill in content in a personal way. In more authoritative forms of hypnosis, the subject is given consciously-directed tasks that seem to do quite the opposite, quieting the default network and the process of search.)

For instance, when asked to "identify a particularly relaxing or enjoyable experience," several (or many) different experiences may come to mind before you settle on one that you want to work with. In conversation with others, transderivational search is part of how we make sense out of what other people say. If someone says something vague like, "I fell in love. Do you know what that's like?" there is no way that we can ever know that our idea or experience of love is anything like that of another person – but our mind sorts through our memories and we make our own delineations and definitions. Transderivational search can be initiated as we seek meaning for a variety of linguistic patterns, individual words, symbols, images, sounds and feelings.

This process of internal search happens quite naturally throughout the day for most, if not all, humans. It can happen noticeably and obviously, or our minds can whiz through a wild range of associated memories in the blink of an eye, too fast for the conscious mind to glimpse. Transderivational search appears to be not

only a natural shift in state by itself, but may also be a major component of how we change state in general.

When we re-access a particular state or feeling using natural or intentional anchors, the state dependent nature of our memory can make it very easy to recall and sort through similar experiences. For instance, if we find and elicit a feeling of joy, our minds become adept at finding various other joyous memories. This suggests a method for finding and accessing resources:

Transderivational Memories

- **Recall an experience of a powerful and pleasant state**. Remember what you saw, what you heard, what you tasted and smelled. Remember how particularly pleasant and powerful it felt.
- **Pay attention to the feeling** associated with the state. Enjoy it.
- **While enjoying the pleasant feeling, let your mind find other memories in which you had a similar feeling**. Notice how these additional memories are accessed – whether they come easily, which senses are involved, what information you can recall that you haven't thought of in a while, and so on.
- **Explore these phenomena with other states and feelings**. Notice if there are any similarities in the way your mind accesses

additional memories. That is, while the content of the memories may be similar or different – how does your mind present the memories to you?

The human brain's tendency to tag memories with submodalities is an ongoing process that involves transderivational search. Indeed, it may well be that every time your mind searches through a stack of inter-related memories, for whatever purpose, on an unconscious level you may be organizing, cataloging and tagging the memories at the same time. The first bit of neurological lore that falls into place here is the concept of "*memory reconsolidation*." This is the idea that every time we call up a memory and then send it back into storage, it may change a little bit.

That's right, just out of sight of your conscious awareness, it seems that the default network flips the switch on transderivational search, tags memories using submodalities, and then reconsolidates the altered memories into what is essentially the story of your life. In effect, submodalities become the language by which the parts of the default network communicate amongst themselves and with other parts of the brain.

Now, if we want to consciously direct changes to the way that we perceive our

selves and our world, we might find it useful to learn and use the "brain language" of submodalities. Luckily, we already know it – it's a part of us. The trick to using it, however, is more a matter of separating it out from the sensory details of content.

The use of submodality information removed from its usual context has formed a part of meditation and mystical teaching for millennia. Concepts such as chi, prana, and kundalini are usually imagined and manipulated as colored (or colorless) light. Vibration, harmony, tingling, rushing, glowing, auras, halos, stillness, smallness, vastness, all terms commonly used to describe mystical or peak experience, are essentially submodality descriptions. The sensory language of mystical literature reaches its purest form with descriptions of boundless light, white light, astral bells, and open-ended descriptions of pure sounds, visions, feelings, and so on. Occultist and yogi Aleister Crowley described one of his pivotal mystical experiences as "Nothingness with twinkles," for instance. Memories marked by glowing, soft expansiveness, for example, may be identified as sacred. Thoughts tagged with rushing, huge, sparkles, perhaps, might denote excitement or arousal. **Changes in sensory submodalties denote change in state**.

At the more practical end of meditation practice and "psychic energy work,"

imagining colored geometric shapes and symbols in and around the body conveys information on an unconscious level through submodality (size, shape, color, brightness, location, movement, etc.) while the symbols themselves may convey information by association and transderivational search. Similarly, the practices of visualizing chakras, sephira, and channels of energy through the spinal column and body rely on metaphoric sensory "brain language" to effect specific changes in state.

While this model of "energy work" places the mystical forces of the human life force in the role of metaphors that describe neurological processes, the forces must still be experienced or imagined as energy, light, temperature, color, shape, movement, fluid, or in other specific sensory terms to alter state and produce results. (And ultimately, we are describing the action of consciousness, whether we decide chi is an actual energy or the attention of the human mind.) A possible limitation of the traditional methods is that they often have a one-size-fits-all approach. Chakras are rainbow colored and magical pentagrams are blue, for one and all. Orbits of energy in the body always flow in one direction to benefit health and mood. A black aura means depression; a white one means spirituality. And so forth. The difficulty here is when these colors, sizes, directions, and other distinctions are offered without any attempt to calibrate for the individual. The psyches of humans are as various as our fingerprints or tax returns; there's no

guarantee that a black aura will mean the same thing for everyone or that blue pentagrams will induce the same state for various and diverse hypnotists and meditators.

Ideomotor Movement

Most hypnotists are familiar with the idea of ideomotor movement or ideomotor response. We can sum up the concept by saying that when we think, our body responds in some way. We often use ideomotor methods as a means of communication with subjects who are in trance, a kind of phone line to the unconscious mind. Familiar applications may include finger signaling, pendulum work, arm levitation, and muscle testing. Ideomotor movement demonstrates what we usually consider as the link between mind and body.

Ideomotor response is not limited to the hypnotist's office, not by any means. In fact, if we know what to look for, we can observe these movements all day long. You are likely to be exhibiting them right now. The most common examples of ideomotor response come in the form of facial expressions. That's right, if you think of something nice or funny, your face makes a smile. If you think of something annoying you might frown. Our thoughts also influence the way we breathe, our posture, hand movements, eye movements, pupil dilation, and much

more.

A key aspect of ideomotor movement is that it occurs on an unconscious level. That is, you don't necessarily intend to smile or laugh, but if the thought prompts, you find yourself doing it before you even realize. Of course we can fake facial expressions and movements, but trained observer can usually tell the difference. For instance, when we do arm levitation with a hypnosis client, there is a characteristic slow, halting movement, as opposed to a smoother, faster movement when the arm is under conscious control. A genuine, unconscious smile, sometimes called a "Duchenne smile", involves most of the face, including major muscles in the cheeks and around the eyes. A fake smile will usually only involve the muscles around the mouth.

In NLP, we talk about "accessing cues," the unconscious ideomotor movements that people make to help them elicit their own thoughts, feelings and states. The most famous of the accessing cues are eye accessing cues and a trained observer can use them to tell which sensory modalities a person might be using, as well as much other useful information. Accessing cues also come in a variety of other forms, including postural cues, gestures, and breathing cues. An interesting application of accessing cues, beyond simply observing how someone is thinking or experiencing, is to use them to help people think or experience in specific

ways. If someone is attempting to recall auditory information, but their accessing cues appear to be all visual or kinesthetic, by having them, for instance, look to the side and breathe from the middle of the chest, they may be able to retrieve the information more easily. Likewise, if someone is experiencing discomfort and we want to help them experience less kinesthetically, we can ask them to look up and breathe from higher in the chest in order to access more visual experience.

When we start to understand how much of our thought and behavior is related to ideomotor movement, the idea of a link between mind and body seems like an understatement. It does appear that we use our body, our nerves, muscles, bones and organs, to think at least as much as we use the clump of neurons in our skull. Even though our language frequently separates mind and body into two distinct categories, it does seem that we have a single, highly integrated system.

Physiological response to interior experience may seem like wasted energy, but it happens for a reason. The singular system of an individual is part of greater systems: friends, family, religion, community, state, nation and world society. Ideomotor movement, from obvious facial expressions to subtler cues of muscles and breathing, provides unconscious social cues that connect us all in a network of information. When we are in the presence of others, we are constantly sharing information about our thoughts and states via these unconscious processes.

The ideomotor process, however, is a two-way street. It's not simply that thoughts produce movements, but – as in the case of accessing cues – movements, body position and breathing patterns can likewise elicit particular thoughts and states. As an experiment, yawn ten times in a row – within just a few yawns, the response shifts from a conscious effort to a fully unconscious, natural yawn. Or sit down with a friend and laugh – and pretty soon the fake laughter becomes real. A recent study also showed that when subjects adopted "open, expansive postures," it produced immediate changes in hormone levels, reducing the stress hormone cortisol and increasing testosterone.

That two-way street also works via the network of social cues that we share with those around us. Studies show that we respond unconsciously to the way others react to us. That is, if the people around you behave toward you as if you are capable, strong, and calm, you may rise to the occasion and actually feel that way. If others treat you with love, you may start to exhibit more loving qualities yourself.

In yoga and other meditation traditions, state of consciousness is influenced through movement, posture and breathing. This is called asana (posture) and pranayama (breath control). Asana ranges from the seated postures used during

meditation to the stretches and movements of hatha yoga. Ultimately, the practices help us to achieve the physiology associated with relaxation, energized alertness, and so on.

We may also notice similar things happening in hypnosis and NLP. In NLP we have the idea of a "complex equivalence," a series of subtle cues that we use to recognize qualities in others. This may be fairly noticeable in an election year when campaigning politicians attempt to strike poses and use verbal tonality to convince us that they are "presidential." To find your own complex equivalences, ask yourself, "How does a person who is [trustworthy, helpful, sexy, loving, compassionate, etc.] look?" What characteristics of posture, movement, breathing and voice contribute to that impression?

We respond to those complex equivalences in every area of our lives. If we are practicing meditation, an instructor who exhibits the appropriate states can better help us achieve them. We can use subtle, ideomotor cues to ascertain whether or not a client has changed state. And it helps our clients when we exhibit confidence and calm as a hypnotist – and it helps if we treat them as if they have already achieved what they came to achieve.

Ticks, Meditation and State Management

In the part of New York State where I live, Lyme disease is at an epidemic level. Quite a few of my friends, family members and acquaintances have experienced this illness. One friend holds the record, as far as I know, having contracted the tick-borne illness a total of four times so far. I'm not far beyond, having received Lyme-infected tick bites on three different occasions over the last seven years.

The last time was in June of 2010. I found a tick on me just a couple days before I was scheduled to leave on a trip to Los Angeles, where I was teaching a weekend seminar. I carefully removed the tick using a tick-puller and figured that I'd done a good job and that the tick hadn't been on me long enough to pass along any illness. I was extremely busy finishing up work, packing and getting ready for the seminar so I put the tick bite out of my mind. The seminar went very well and when I returned there were clients and other seminars to prepare for, in England, Europe and other parts of the USA. The bug bite didn't itch or hurt and I forgot about it for a while.

In late August things started to get a little strange. I noticed that I was getting a bit weepy and nostalgic – and those are two words I'd never, ever pick to describe myself. And not only was it odd for me to feel that way, the emotions were being triggered by very unusual things. One day I found myself feeling sentimental about a dishwasher that we used to own. Man, I really missed that old machine. That is, I missed it until my wife reminded me that I always hated the noisy monster. I reflected on that. It was true. It was a strange thing for me to experience nostalgia, let alone for a piece of kitchen equipment that I never actually liked! The weepiness was followed, somewhat randomly over the next couple months, by other emotional outbursts, including anger, fear, and despair, all triggered by thoughts that, considered later, were really not worth the response – not to mention that I'm generally a calm, secure and optimistic person. What was going on in my brain?

What was happening in my brain was that a colony of Borrelia spirochetes, the bacteria responsible for Lyme disease, had taken up residence and was, apparently, pushing buttons that messed with my emotional state. It was around that time that other Lyme symptoms started to show up and I went to the doctor and got my diagnosis. The emotional effects of Lyme disease are rarely discussed by doctors, but a quick search of medical literature turned up over a hundred

studies that recorded psychological symptoms. For instance, one study (Functional brain imaging and neuropsychological testing in Lyme disease. Fallon BA, Das S, Plutchok JJ, Tager F, Liegner K, Van Heertum R. Clin Infect Dis. 1997 Jul;25 Suppl 1:S57-63. Review.) reported that "Patients with Lyme disease may experience short-term memory loss, severe depression, panic attacks, unrelenting anxiety, impulsivity, paranoia, obsessive compulsive disorder, personality changes marked by irritability and mood swings, and rarely, manic episodes or psychotic states." Nothing specifically about dishwasher nostalgia, but we can file that under "personality changes" or "mood swings."

I've spent the last thirty or so years of my life practicing meditation and studying state management techniques. Back when I began meditating, I was told that one really starts to notice the results of meditation after 20 years. That seemed like an inordinately long time, back in my youth, and I was quite pleased to notice positive affects fairly quickly in my practice – increasing calm through the days, better sleep at night, ability to relax at will, and much more. But now, decades later, I'm pleased to say that there was also some truth to the advance hype. The long-term positive effects of meditation, for me, amount to, in large part, more of the same, a calmer mind and generally more relaxed mental state. But beyond that, the greatest benefit from all those years sitting and breathing is an understanding of the processes of my mind and an increased ability to observe

those processes. Metaphorically speaking, the process of meditation has taught me how to better step back from my own thoughts and observe, listen, and feel what my own brain may be doing. While I'm not sure I'd refer to this as "enlightenment," this ability has certainly saved my sanity more than a few times.

So, while Borrelia bacteria were messing around in my neurons, I found myself in an odd situation. While part of my consciousness experienced a roller coaster of unusual emotions, I was also sitting back, observing my thoughts and behavior. I suppose I've been doing this increasingly all along; now the rapid bacterial shifts in emotion threw it into high relief. Part of my mind, at least, was maintaining its cool. As in a meditation practice, when I became aware of the changes in state, I was moved to accept the change and return my attention to the present.

I think it might be important to reiterate the basic process of meditation here. The meditator attempts to hold attention on a word, symbol, breathing, sitting, being present or any of a thousand other techniques. In mindfulness meditation, one holds attention on the process of consciousness itself. The mind, through its tendency to form associations or because it just likes to wander, will stray from the object of concentration. These breaks in concentration may start from a physical sensation (my foot itches!) or a thought (did I leave the toaster plugged in?) or a daydream (imagine meditating like this on top of a remote Himalayan

peak!) or from any of a thousand other distractions. The meditator notices the break in concentration, accepts it without judgment, and then returns to the intended concentration.

It's the same process that we use throughout our lives, on long-term projects or life goals. We set out with our minds focused on one thing – a way of life, a job, a certain kind of family – and we become distracted and must regain our focus. It was this life-process-as-meditation that Lyme disease kept bringing into my consciousness – and my daily life that I had to continually return my attention to. Without the years of meditation practice, I could easily have become lost in the seeming reality of these emotional shifts.

I also found great benefit from short-term hypnosis and NLP techniques to deal with pain and to change state. First, though, I had to realize that my state had changed, which sounds like a simple thing, but when it happens the shifts are so subjective that they are easy to mistake for legitimate mental processes and not the result of illness. Some of the state management techniques that I used can be found in my book *Brain Magick: Exercises in Meta-Magick and Invocation* (Llewellyn Worldwide, October 2011).

So it took a few months of powerful antibiotics, prescribed by my doctor, to get

the bugs out of my system. Because of the physical symptoms of the disease, I wasn't able to work for a good part of that time, but now I feel like my mind and body are mine again. It was a difficult few months, but I can only imagine how awful it might have been if it weren't for meditation and hypnosis.

With the benefits of 30 years of meditation on my side, or with the tools of my trade in hand, it all came down to being prepared. In life we often take it for granted that we should learn the steps of driving a car before getting out into heavy traffic, or that we'll do better in a fight if we've practiced martial arts previously, or that our violin recital will go much better if we learn the pieces and perfect them first. How about being prepared for whatever life throws at you – from changing circumstances, financial difficulties, family problems or whatever – by practicing and perfecting our ability to change state beforehand?

I'll leave you with a quick meditation. It's about as simple as it gets, but can be as deep and effective as any other form of meditation:

Simple Zen – at least 10 minutes

Sit in a position with your spine vertical and straight (a chair will do nicely). Allow your breathing to become relaxed and natural. Let it set its own rhythm and depth, however it is comfortable. Focus your attention on your

breathing, on the movements of your chest and abdomen rather than on your nose and mouth. Keep your attention focused on your breathing. For some people an additional level of concentration may be helpful. You might add a simple counting rhythm, spoken in your head as you breathe: "One" on the inhale, "Two" on the exhale, and repeat. Or you might visualize your breath as a swinging door, swinging in on the inhale and out on the exhale.